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SUBJECT: REMNANTS OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

REF: Vancouver 45

11. (SBU) Summary: As President Obama noted in Strasbourg on April 3, anti-Americanism in developed countries is sometimes both "casual and insidious." Canada's traditionally liberal universities have often displayed some anti-American biases, as Emboff discovered first-hand as a part-time graduate student at the University of Ottawa in 2008. Students criticized the U.S. human rights record and international human rights stances, and professors claimed that international organizations had become ineffective "captives" of the U.S. The new administration of President Obama has provided a notable respite from such rhetoric nationwide (reftel), but Canada's perennial desire to differentiate itself from its larger neighbor means that some anti-Americanism will inevitably creep back in academic and public discourse. End summary.

CANADIAN ANTI-AMERICANISM NOT A NEW PHENOMENON

12. (SBU) In many ways lacking a strong national identity, Canadians often define themselves simply by stating what they are not -- American. According to one University of Ottawa professor, Canadian identity is based largely on those things Canadians feel they "do better" than the U.S.: e.g., implementing government-run social welfare programs; abiding by moral underpinnings; establishing a harmonious yet multicultural and diverse population; and, peacekeeping rather than peacemaking.

13. (SBU) In Strasbourg on April 3, President Obama was speaking to Europeans about Europe but he could just as well have substituted the words "Canada" and "Canadians" when he said, "But in Europe, there is an anti-Americanism that is at once casual but can also be insidious. Instead of recognizing the good that America so often does in the world, there have been times where Europeans choose to blame America for much of what's bad. On both sides of the Atlantic, these attitudes have become all too common. They are not wise. They do not represent the truth. They threaten to widen the divide across the Atlantic and leave us both more isolated. They fail to acknowledge the fundamental truth that America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but that Europe cannot confront them without America."

14. (SBU) Apart from surges of solidarity after 9/11 and after President Obama's election and -- even more so, his February 19 visit (reftel) -- many Canadian politicians, pundits, and, most of all, academics at traditionally liberal universities have resorted too easily to a shallow anti-Americanism. The war in Iraq and the detentions at Guantanamo Bay further added fuel to this fire, which is at distinct odds from the overwhelmingly friendly partnership between our nations and people. Emboff witnessed such attitudes first-hand as a part-time graduate student at the University of Ottawa from winter 2007 through summer 2008.

STUDENTS CRITICIZE U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD...

15. (SBU) During an international human rights law class at the University of Ottawa, students and the professor frequently lobbed criticisms of the U.S. human rights record, claiming that the U.S.

was unwilling to support international human rights measures and that the U.S. was not a strong defender of human rights. At least once each class session, the professor would ask which country was "once again noticeably absent" from the list of countries that had ratified a particular international human rights document, i.e., the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention Against Torture, or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Rather than answering verbally, students would point at Emboff -- their way of saying that the U.S. was once again the "culprit." The professor, also a visiting fellow at the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, even apologized to Emboff on multiple occasions and at times made concerted efforts to explain to students the reasoning behind U.S. human rights policies. Even after such explanations, however, students remained extremely critical of U.S. human rights policies. Students stated they could not understand, for example, how the U.S. could be opposed to a convention supporting the elimination of discrimination against women, or defending the rights of children. Emboff often attempted to further explain the U.S. point of view (although generally without much success), emphasizing that the U.S. had unique concerns considering its geo-political position.

¶6. (SBU) Class members proudly expounded on their view of Canada as a proponent of peaceful conflict resolution, focusing on examples such as former Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson's pioneering peacekeeping under the United Nations, and Canadian Senator Romeo Dallaire's leadership of the ill-fated UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda. Students and the professor also highlighted Canada's membership, and the U.S.'s lack of membership, in the UN Human Rights Council. (This was before the USG's recent decision to seek a seat in 2009.) In addition, students constantly criticized

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the U.S. for its treatment of Omar Khadr, a Canadian detainee at Guantanamo, arguing that the U.S. should return him immediately to Canada and claiming he faced no possibility of a fair trial or humane treatment in the U.S. (The Canadian government has never requested his repatriation, indicating instead that it will await the outcome of ongoing judicial processes.)

...AND DISCUSS DECLINE OF U.S. HEGEMONY

¶7. (SBU) At a summer 2008 global economic issues class also at the University of Ottawa, the professor opened the first class session by explaining that the course would focus on how the U.S. had lost its economic and political "hegemony," and how China and the EU had become leaders in a new multi-polar world. The professor asserted that the "U.S.-led agenda" had failed, and stated that the World Bank, IMF, and UN had become ineffective "captives of the U.S." After a two-hour lecture on the loss of U.S. economic power and the negative impact of the U.S. on the world economy, the professor closed the first day of class by claiming that then-President George W. Bush and the Republican Party were responsible for a drop in the percentage of women in the workforce, and that the U.S. was an "embarrassment" regarding equality and equal opportunity.

¶8. (SBU) In subsequent classes, the professor repeatedly blamed the U.S. for the "failed world economic situation" and for the "ineffectiveness" of international institutions. While criticizing the U.S. for controlling international institutions, however, the professor also claimed the U.S. had lost its power and influence in the world. He asserted that people throughout the world no longer watched American movies or paid attention to U.S. culture, and that the EU had replaced the U.S. as the world's cultural leader. Students argued only over whether it was the EU or China that had replaced the U.S. as the world's most influential economy, and discussed why the U.S. "attempt at world domination" had failed. The professor claimed that since the loss of U.S. hegemony in approximately 2000, the world had entered the most "decentralized" period in history.

¶9. (SBU) The professor and students were especially critical of the Republican Party and then-President George W. Bush. The professor asserted that the Republican Party had "thrown people under the bus" to keep capitalism going, and called the Republican Party an "unnatural union" that economic and social conservatives had created to gain popular support. Students engaged in similar rhetoric, claiming the Republican Party was opposed to "idealism," and blaming the U.S. government (especially the George W. Bush administration) for allowing so many Americans to go without health insurance and other social benefits so commonly provided to Canadian residents.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Since the end of both 2008 university courses, Canada has experienced a wave of excitement and pro-U.S. sentiment in connection with the election of President Obama. Canada was enraptured by the U.S. presidential election campaign, with media and citizens paying more attention to the U.S. election than to Canada's own October 2008 parliamentary election, and Canadians expressing overwhelming support for President Obama. Canadians also displayed a marked level of interest and excitement during President Obama's February 2009 visit to Ottawa -- his first foreign trip in office and a return to what Canadians saw as a tradition of U.S. presidents making Canada their first foreign visit. However, as the excitement of the U.S. presidential election wears off and as the reality of the world economic downturn sets in, Canadians -- including not only academics and media commentators but often politicians -- may well be unable to resist reverting to their long-standing concern about U.S. "domination" and their need to differentiate themselves from Americans.

BREESE